

S P E A K I N ' T I M E

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by

"HÄUD SICCAR"  
(Roxburghshire Dialect)



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The maister cam through the barn intae the engine-hoose when A was busy wi' the blaw-lamp.

"No sic a bad mornin', Andra," says he.

"Na," says I.

"Ye'll hae tae watch that belt," says he, "the join's no ower guid."

"Aye," says I. A gied the blaw-lamp anither twae-three ca's.

"It'll be gettin' on for the herds' an' stewards' hirin'," says the maister.

"Aye," says I, "Friday it'll be."

"Hae ye talkit' it ower wi' the wife?" says he.

Says I:

"The wife wants intae the toon. She's got a cuisin,"

A says, "that could get me a job wi' the Cooncil. It wad be fifty bob a week an' a free hoose."

"Aye," says the maister. "Aweel, Andra," he says, "it's

mair than A can gie ye."

"A ken that," says I.

"Ye're wise tae gaun where ye can get it," says he. "A'll be away quick tae the sale, but ye ken what's what. Threshin' this mornin' an' on tae the muck and the plooin' i' the efter-nune."

"An' that's that by", says I tae masel. "Maybe she'll be pleased now."

The engine was dour tae stert an' the barley was maist infernal stoory.

"That strae barn's fair the Black Hole o' Calcutta", says Liz Henderson when oo stoppit for oor tea at echt o'clock. "It's no fit for a beast tae be in." 'Thrawn Liz' the folk ca' her. She's a soor yin.

"That's a' richt," says the odd laddie, cheeky-like, "there's juist you an' Black Aggie in't."

Aggie Black chased the laddie oot o' the stable.

"A dinna see what wey the laddie canna take a turn at cairryin' strae," girns Liz.

"Nae mair dae I," A says, "but that the laddie's gaun oot wi' sheep feedin' tae the Hummelly-knowe an' A want the gate-posts left staunin' an' the cairt for tae come hame alang wi' the horse. Ye mind what the maister said the last time ye got the odd cairt," says I, "when ye had Auld Bell trainin' for the Grand National

"An' are ee stoppin'?" says I, gottin' a word in firts.

alang the Loan Road, wi' the cairt trams ahint her an' the turnips i' the pound."

Liz said nae mair.

A was helpin' the laddie tae cairry sheep feed doon frae the loft when oo saw the rat.

"There a rat!" says he. "What a muckle bruiser! It gaed in ahint that bag."

A took a look, but there was naethin' there.

"Maybe it's gaed in ablo thae empty secks", says the laddie. Juist then the rat cam' oot an' A got ma fit on him.

"Nabbit 'm!" yells the laddie, clattin' the rat wi' the besom handle. "Oh, boy, what a size!"

"Get on wi' yer wark," says I. "What div' ee think the maister peys ye fifteen bob a week for - tae speak American an' hunt rats? Ye'll dae five rakes afore ye lowse," says I, takin' oot ma watch. The laddie got doon the stairs gey nippy.

Things was gaun on a richt i' the barn, sae A gaed tae gie the herd a hand tae lade the sheep.

"Are ye spoken tae?" says he, "Come in tae ma fit, ye doited eediot! Ma maun, if A come till ee!" That's a gey donnert collie o' the herd's.

"Aye," says I. "Are ee?"

"Five meenits sin'," says he.

"An' are ee stoppin'?" says I, gettin' ma word in firsts.



"Gor," says he, "A dinna ken. Anither sale like the last yin an' A'll take tae bein' a shopkeeper. Lie doon, ye wudden-heided, pot-bellied gomeril."

But the herd aye stops onyway.

A gaed up tae the lows in' loft where auld Geordie was feedin' in tae the mill.

"How is't gaun in, Geordie?" says I.

"Oh, no sae bad," says he. "Stoory a wee, but no mony thistles. This'll be yon pickle oot the corner o' the Gowan Brae?"

"Aye," says I.

"Then it's nae ither wonder," says Geordie. "It was gey ill tae win. It'll no be runnin weel?"

"Oh, gey licht," says I. "Six bags the now".

"Aye," says Geordie. "Hen's meat."

That Gowan Brae was a fair hairt-break last summer. It's rocky land an' a' yon sun dried it up till ee could lie doon at the side o' the crop an' watch the rabbits play tig i' the middle, an' then the weather broke afore oo could get it in. A tell't the maister it wad hae been safer in gress, but he'll never let on he's bate wi' a field.

A met the byreman i' the passage cairryin' strae tae his closes.

"Steward," says he, "A'm gettin' gey weel away wi' the cotton cake."

"Aye," says I, "an' ye couldnae hae tell't me that i' the mornin' afore the maister gaed away tae the sale? How lang wull't lest ye?" A ken that byreman.

"Or the morn nicht," says he.

"If it was yer ain denner," A says, "ye'd be lookin' a bit farther in front o' yer lang nose, ye glaikit gowk. Aweel, A'll juist likely hae tae get the mistress tae phone the mills. But for peety's sake gain in'tae yer cake hoose an' take a look about ye an' make shair that's a' ye're needin'. Oo dinna want lorries comin' oot here in a procession like James's Fair," A says.

"A' richt," says he, door-like.

Oo feenisht a stack ten meenits afore denner-time, sae A tell't the folk tae lowse an' oo'd stert sherp i' the efternune. A had the barn tae soop up efter that, an' it was past twal when A gaed in for ma denner.

It had come on a drizzle o' rain, an' it bein' washin' day the wife had a' the claes steamin' afore the fire. The bairns was at their denner.

"Ye're late," says the wife, pittin' ma broth on the table.

"Aye," says I.

"Sic a mornin as A've had," she says.

"Sae it wad seem," says I, lookin' roond the kitchen. A could hardly see the dish-press for steam.

"Weel," says the wife, gey nippy, "Where wad ye hae me pit them? The claes has tae be dried. An' A can tell ye A'm fair scunnert, cairryin' in the waitter an' heatin' t, an' cairryin't oot again when it's dirty."

"Ye've dune 't this twenty year," says I.

"That's juist it," says she.

"Aweel," A says, "ye'll sune be in yer braw cooncil hoose now, an' then ye'll hae het an' cald tae rin doon the drain tae yer hairt's content."

The wife lets doon a pot wi' a bang and turns round.

"Hae ye tell't him?" says she.

"Aye," says I, "A've tell't him. Ye've been jammerin' at me tae tell him this last twae weeks, haven't ee? What are ye lookin' sae dumb-foonert aboot?"

"Oh, naethin'," says she "Rin on back tae the schule, bairns, or ye'll be late."

"A'll take ma puddin'", says I. "A hedna muckle time masel."

A hedna gotten weel stertit tae ma puddin when a knockcam tae the door, an' young Wull Henderson sings oot "Major's battit."

"Damn it," says I, gettin' up.

"Feenish yer puddin'" says the wife, "the horse canna be that bad. Ye've no been in ten meanits."

"Na, na," says I, pitgin on ma bonnet, "ye may hae me fillin' in time sheets for some o' yer braw trade unions efter the term, but A'll please masel the now, an' A'm no gaun tae sit an' feed masel when Major's bad."

They'd gotten Major intae the lousebox when A gaed oot. He was gey bad, but A've seen him waur. - A mind the maister had tae stick a knife in him yince tae let the gas off. He's a grand horse, Major, but he was aye kinda wake i' the stomach.

"Nbw, now, Major," A says, "what's this ye're efter?"

Major let oot anither groan. He gets nervous aboot himsel juist like a human body, but if the maister or me's there he kens it'll be a' richt.

"Come on, ma fine fellae," says I, "up on yer feet. Ye're no for the kennels this day yet."

It was a while afore A got him up, an' A was gey near sendin' for the vet yin time, but by twae o'clock he was settled. It wasna worth while gaun back for the rest o' ma denner then.

"Ye've dune grand," says I tae Major, "gettin' yersel an efternune off and keepin' me rinnin' roond for an hoor." Major cam nosin' up agin ma pocket. A whiles cairry sugar in't.

"Ye auld sinner!" says I. "Ye're as daft as a yearlin', an mair bother than ye're worth. Mony's the ploy ye've had in this box sin' the nicht ye was foaled in't." A can mind that nicht like yesterday - the maister an' me workin' on auld Dolly i' the lamp-light, an' her that prood o' her bonny wee foal when it stood up tae sook. She was a guid mare, Dolly.

A gaed awa oot tae the Sooth Rig tae see how the plooin' was gettin' on. Auld Geordie was gettin' ower the grund bonny and young Wull daen away further ower, but the tractor was stoppit deid efter half a dizzen furs,

"What's up?"



"What's up?" says I tae the tractor-man.

"Demned if A ken," says he, "she reisted hauf an hoor back, an' A'm fair bate wi' 'er."

Oo pit in anither hauf-hoor wi' that tractor, an' A did a'thing but kick her. Young Wull Henderson left his horse at the heidrigg an' cam' ower.

"Hae ye tried the carburettor?" says he. A awfu' near kickit Wull.

"Now ma young smerty," says I, "ye may hae a cuisin that's a bus conductor an' ye may be a grand rider on a pillion, but a' ye ken aboot the guts o' a tractor ye could write roond yer fag - an' withoot filin' the cork tip aither. Get back tae yer wark," says I, "an' if ye keep yer ee'n on yon tree at the far side instead o' the tractor maybe ye'll manage tae keep yer furs sae's the hares can rin doon them withoot coupin at the corners."

Five meenits efter that the tractor gaed off. It had been the feed a' the time.

A stood an' watched her hum up the brae. Tractors is grand things when they gaun. There was an awfu' bonny sunset gaun on abin' the trees at the tap o' the field, and the furs were iyin' up the hill braw an' even - an' guid rich land at that. A mindit what the Rig was like fowerteen years sin' - dirty, hungry, stany grund, - an' how oo'd cleaned it an' worked it an' fed it till it was yin o' the best fields on the place.

"Oo'll get a grand crop off't this time," thinks A tae masel -

an' then A mindit A wadnae be there at hervest time. Some ither man wad be stackin' that corn.

The gamekeeper cam up the road an' stoppit on the ither side o' the gate. A dacent man, but a fair auld wife tae blether.

"Fine nicht, steward," says he.

"It is that," says I.

"The Rig's in guid hairt," he says.

"Aye," says I.

"They tell me," says the gamekeeper, "that ye're no stoppin' on this year."

"Deed," says I, "an' whae nicht they be?"

"Oh," says the gamekeeper, fidgin' his feet aboot, "ma guid-brither that bides near yer wife's cuisin juist said -"

"Aye," says I. "If A hed the wife's cuisin here," A says, "A wadnae be jinin' they twae bits o' twine tae haud the gate. A'd juist get him tae cast his tongue roond the post."

"Aye," says the gamekeeper. "Weel, there's some that juist speaks for speakin's sake."

"That's richt," says I.

It was gettin' gey snell by lousin-time an' A was gled tae get in tae ma supper. The kitchen was kinda cheery wi' the curtains pu'd an' a guid fire on. The washin' was strung up oot o' the road across the ceilin'.

"Hullo, Jeanie," says I, "what are ye daen wi' that braw

frock on?"

"It's yin A got frae Miss Jinty," says Jeanie, "an' ma auntie was here till her tea."

"An' how mony pandies the day?" says I tae the laddie.

"Juist fower," says he.

The wife wasnae sayin' muckle an' Jeanie was terrible quiet for her.

"Where's yer tongue, hen?" says I tae her efter supper-time. Jeanie hidit her face agin' ma coat.

"A dinna want tae gaun tae the toon," says she.

"What!" says I, "No want tae gaun aside the braw shops an' the picters?"

"Na," says Jeanie, beginnin' tae greet, "Miss Jinty's gaun tae get a powny, an' A want tae bide here."

"An' what about you?" says I tae the laddie. "Div ee want tae gaun tae the toon?"

The laddie lookit at the flair.

"Na," says he.

"He disnae ken," says his mother, "he's bid here a' his life an' if ye let him he'll stert off for an odd laddie when he leaves the schule an' never get off a ferm. He'll no have a chance. Dinna greet, <sup>Jeanie</sup> ~~Jinty~~," she says, "ye'll like the toon grand when ye're there. Think o' the braw schule ye'll gaun tae."

"It's ill on the bairn leavin' Miss Jinty," says I, "they've grown up thegither - the same as Maister Jock an' the laddie here."

"An' they'll grow apairt," says the wife, "when they leave the schule."

"The maister an' me was loons at the schule thegither thirty years sin," says I, "when ma faither was steward wi' his. An' whên oo left the schule an' he was the young maister an' methe odd laddie did it make ony difference? Has't ever made ony difference?"

"Maybe no," says she, "but things is no the same nowadays. Guid kens it's no masel A'm thinkin' aboot - A dinnae want tae gaun, an' A'll miss ma bonny gairden sair. But it's the bairns. They should hae their chance, an' they'll no get it here. Fermin's dune."

"A want tae be a hind," says the laddie.

A got up tae gaun oot.

"Aye," says I, "he wants tae be a hind. He's wantit it a' his thirteen year. An' if ye tak him in tae the toon an' efter anither year he's still no e wantin' tae be a shop-walker or a second Clark Gable what'll ye dae then? Tell me that!"

But she didnae tell me that.

A gaun aye roond the steadin' an' lock up afore A gaun in tae see the maister at echt o'clock. A was longer than ordinar' that nicht - A was airly, an' it was kinda peacefu' i' the steadin' efter haein' words wi' the wife. Dark, an' no a soond forby a bit grunt here an' there frae a beast that was a kennin' ower fou. A gaed through the stable an' a' roond the parricks an' closes - A even had a look intae the pig-styes though A'm no keen on pigs.



Oo've fairly improved that steadin' this last ten year, the maister an' me. Oo pit the electric licht through't i' the backend. It's awfu' handy - juist a touch on the switch, an' ye get daylight wherever ye want. Nae mair manoeuvrin' wi' a lamp when there's a coo calfin' or a horse no richt.

When A'd been a' roond A stood an' lookit doon the lang passage, a' soopit up tidy wi' the beas' on baith sides lyin' weel-fed an' contentit i' their clean strae. Somewey it pit me in mind o' the Sooth Rig an' the grand crop that wad be in't come hervest time, an' the lambin' yowes that was lyin' warm i' the shed at the ither side o' the steadin'. A maun hae stood there ten meenits, juist lookin' an' thinkin'. Then A pit oot the licht.

"Fermin's dune, is't?" says I tae masel. "Fermin's dune! Goad, what makes weemin try tae speak poalitics!"

Meg Broon gaed through tae the room tae say A was in.

"Ye're tae gaun ben," says she, comin' back tae the kitchen "an' A hope yer feet's clean, for ma linoleum's new polished." Weemin's tempers is a' the same on washin' day.

A gaed ben an' knockit on the room door.

"Come in, Andra," cries the mistress, an' the maister reaches oot an' pu's in a chair tae the fire. But A sat doon at the ither side o' the table. Miss Jinty an' Maister Jock was sittin' at their sums juist the same as ma Jeanie, an' the mistress was busy wi' her mendin'.

"Weel, Andra," says the maister, "oo got a better trade the day."

"Oh?" says I.

"Aye," says he, "seeventy-five bob. Oo tappit the sale."

"Aye!" says I. "Gor," A says tae masel, "that's something like. That's where oo belang! That herd'll be stoppin' now, a' richt."

"How's things gaun on?" says the maister.

"Oh, a' richt," says I.

"Sooth Rig's turnin' up bonny," says he.

"Aye," says I.

"They beas is daein weel," he says.

"Aye," says I

"Andra," says Miss Jinty, lookin' up sudden, "tell Jeanie the answer's forty-nine. It's juist come oot."

"A' richt," says I. The maister gied a bit lauch.

"Better get on wi' the ploo i' the mornin'," says he.

"Aye," says I.

"An' a set on tae muck," says he.

"Aye," says I.

"Major a' richt again?" says the maister.

"Aye," says I.

"The herd'll likely want an odd cairt," he says.

"Aye," says I.

A was lookin' at the maister sittin' there wi' his head

turned away frae me. Somewey he didnae look that very muckle different frae he did thirty year sin when oo played truant thegither tae sclimb trees an' herry birds' nests. The maister was an awfu' deil tae sclimb.

"Ye'll be wantin' tae the fair on Friday?" he says.

"Maister Tom," A says, "if it's a' the same tae you A'll - A'll be stoppin' on."

"Aye," says the maister.....

Ther' an' awfu' queer kinda pattern on the big hoose tablecloth. A've noticed it afore.

"Ye'll be pittin' the weemin on tae spread i' the mornin'?" says the maister.

"Aye," says I.

"Ye've been here a guid bit now, Andra," he says.

"Aye," says I.

"Thirteen years," says the mistress, " -since the year Jinty was born."

"The year Major was foaled," says I.

"Aye," says the maister.

"Aweel," says I, "A'll be gettin' away tae ma bed. Guidnicht."

"Guidnicht," says a'body.

A got as far's the door.

"Oh, by the by, Andra," says the maister.

"Aye?" says I.

"The wireless says 'further ootlook unsettled'", says he,

"ye'll no likely can feenish i' the Sooth Rig the morn?"

A lookit roond.

"Oo may no feenish't," says I, "but oo'll gied a maist  
almighty gliff."

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